AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: INTRODUCTION

I. COURSE OVERVIEW, REQUIREMENTS & READINGS

A. Staff backgrounds: who are SVE, DC, AG, SL, CT.

B. Major questions addressed in 17.403:
   1. **Explanations** & families of explanations for US policy: which are valid?
      Image I: the nature of individuals.
      Image II: the nature of states and societies.
      Image III: the distribution of international power, & the nature of states' international environment.
   2. **Evaluation** of past US policy: were the premises behind it valid or false? Did it produce good/bad results?
      a. Its effects on the USA & US interests: good or bad?
         -- National security interests: the preservation of sovereignty and the avoidance of war. Have past wars, interventions, doctrines and other policies made the US more or less secure?
         -- Economic interests (including environmental interests). Have past US policies enhanced these?
         -- Philanthropic interests (promoting human rights, "doing the right thing"). What system of ethics should guide foreign policy? Have past US policies measured up to it?
      b. Its effects on other peoples and states.
   3. **Policy prescription**: what should now be done? Regarding, e.g., China & Taiwan, Rwanda/Burundi, Kosovo/Bosnia, national ballistic missile defense, NATO expansion, trade policy, and more.
   4. **Predictions**: what will be done?

C. Class requirements & readings.
   -- Discussion sections.
   -- They are important. So ...
   -- Please show up for section, and come prepared to participate.
   -- We need your help!
   -- Congressional hearings and debates in discussion section.
   -- Papers.
   -- Quizzes.
   -- Final.
   -- Readings.

>> Why do we emphasize developing your communication skills? Because you will need communication skills to achieve the spectacular success in life that you deserve. Many MIT alumni have remarked
that they later found they needed more communication and leadership skills to rise to the top in life. We are here to help with that.

>> Zero nada no background knowledge of U.S. foreign policy/diplomatic history is assumed for this course.

>> Feel free to consult 17.403 staff about non-17.403 stuff, like planning your career. We will offer what wisdom we can.

II. WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?
   A. Experimentation v. observation.
   B. Large-n studies v. case studies.
   C. Testing theories v. applying theories to explain history v. policy evaluation & prescription.
   D. Clocks, Clouds & Chaos Theory:
      -- If accidents, personalities, and serendipity shape history, how can general theories explain the past? Annie Oakley's central role in world history etc.
      -- Does politics have discoverable regularities--laws of motion--like those of the physical world?
   E. Why is political science primitive?

III. IMAGE III BACKGROUND FACTORS: THE EVOLUTION OF THE GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER, 1789–1993. See tables from Paul Kennedy, Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, and Kenneth Oye, Eagle In a New World, esp. tables 6, 17, 18, 31, 35, 4-1, and chart 2 on pages 3, 6, 7, 15, 16, 19, and 20 (handwritten numeration) of handout.
   A. The nature of international power: Industrial power = military power = power.
   C. The delayed growth of American military power, 1789–1943.
   D. The concentration of industrial power in the a few places--North America, Europe, and Japan.
   E. Did American foreign & military policy make power-political sense?
      1. US mobilization strategy: frugal prudence or strategic blunder?
      2. US geopolitical engagements: did they avert real dangers?
         Specifically, if a state conquered all of industrial Eurasia (that is, Western Europe, Russia and Japan) would it then have enough power to possibly conquer the US?
      3. US & the 3rd World: did US Cold War intervention make geopolitical sense?
   F. The rise of China and the future of global politics.

IV. IMAGE II BACKGROUND FACTORS: THE EVOLUTION OF U.S. POLITICS & SOCIETY
   A. Waning ignorance: the growth of American knowledge of the world.
   B. The democratization of U.S. foreign policymaking.
   C. The changing U.S. economy:
      -- the end of fears of depression after 1941.
      -- the levelling of American society after 1941.
   D. The decline of racism & the growth of tolerance.

V. OVERVIEW OF US DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, 1789–1993, & DEBATES ABOUT IT: 11 WARS, 5 CRISES & 30+ INTERVENTIONS IN A NUTSHELL
A. Old-time wars (we won't cover in 17.403):
   1. The "Indian Wars," 1492-1890.
   2. The War of 1812, 1812-1815.
   3. The Mexican War, 1846-1848.
   4. The U.S. Civil War, 1861-1865.
   5. The War with Spain, 1898; the US-Filipino War, 1899-1902.


C. World War II, 1939-1945: causes of US entry? Was entry wise? Did the US wage the war wisely? Was the war preventable? If it was preventable, who was most responsible for its outbreak? (FDR? US isolationists? Woodrow Wilson and his misbegotten Versailles Treaty? Etc.)

D. The Cold War, 1946-1989: who/what caused it? Was it preventable? Was it necessary? Was it wisely conducted?

E. The Korean War, 1950-1953: who started it? Why did it escalate? Why didn't it lead to World War III? Was US entry wise or necessary? Was US crossing of 38th parallel wise or necessary?


I. The end of the Cold War, 1989ff.

J. The historiography of American foreign relations: how "nationalist"? how "presentist"?